BRUNSWICK & NORTH KITE RESIDENTS’ ASSOCIATION (BruNK)

RESPONSE TO CAMBRIDGE CITY COUNCIL’S CONSULTATION ON ‘SKYLINE GUIDANCE’

9 December 2011

1. BruNK welcomes the fact that the Skyline Guidance has been drafted as it believes that such guidance is urgently needed given the number of completed and planned or proposed new high rise developments in the City. We are encouraged that it “is not intended to promote tall buildings in Cambridge” as we value the relatively low-level skyline that the City has, at least until recently, generally protected.

2. BruNK notes that the current planning policy states:

“New buildings which are significantly taller than their neighbours and/or roof-top plant or other features on existing buildings, will only be permitted if it can be demonstrated that they will not detract from:

a. local residential amenity;
b. ancient monuments and their settings;
c. Listed Buildings and their settings;
d. Conservation Areas and their settings;
e. historic landscapes and their settings; and
f. key vistas, the skyline and views within, over and from outside the City”.

BruNK covers a part of the City that includes all of the features above ie:

a. BruNK’s area is predominantly streets of residential dwellings
b. BruNK’s area includes Christchurch on Newmarket Road
c. BruNK’s area has over 60 Grade II Listed buildings, including some of the best domestic Georgian, Regency and early Victorian architecture in Cambridge on Maids Causeway, eg the "Doll Houses" built by Cambridge architect Charles Humfrey, now commemorated by a blue plaque at the corner of Maids Causeway and Fair Street
d. Maids Causeway and Newmarket Road are part of the Kite Conservation Area
e. BruNK’s northern boundary is adjacent to Midsummer Common; our south western boundary abuts New Square – both are important green spaces in the centre of the City
f. The views from, towards and beyond Midsummer Common in every direction are an important and valuable feature of the City

Comments on specific points in the new Assessment Criteria in Chapter 4

Criteria 1: Location, setting and context

4.4.9 While the City is generally level and low lying, there are areas of higher land located around Castle Hill to the north of the river crossing at Bridge Street. Where
possible, taller buildings should be located in lower lying areas of the City. Locating tall buildings on elevated areas of land can result in buildings appearing significantly larger than they actually are. Any tall buildings within raised areas, such as Castle Hill will be subject to particularly close scrutiny.

We agree with this but must point out that the new housing currently being built on the raised land overlooking Midsummer Common on the former Cambridge Regional College site will be 7 storeys high! If this guidance had been followed, permission for buildings of this height would surely not have been given.

Criteria 2: Historical Impact

4.4.11 Applicants should make reference to the ‘Historic Core Appraisal’ undertaken by the Council and the various Conservation Area Appraisals undertaken across the City. These documents provide detailed assessments of the area in respect to their history, urban form, character, key buildings and views amongst others.

We note the weight given to the Historic Core Appraisal but are dismayed to see that streets in our area including Maids Causeway, Newmarket Road, Fair Street, Willow Walk and New Square – which have over 60 Listed Buildings and are part of the Kite Conservation Area, are not mentioned in this document. We also note that several residents associations were consulted during the appraisal, but BruNK was not among them. We believe this is a serious oversight.

BruNK’s recommendations and observations

1. Views of and from the Midsummer Common area should be protected as part of the Historic Core. The significant views from MSC include: towards the Abbey area including the technology museum chimney; towards Jesus College and All Saints Church in Jesus Lane; towards the Dolls Houses on Maids Causeway and the Wesley Church on Short Street; towards the River Cam and the boat-houses on the northern bank.

2. The density as well as the height of new buildings should be taken into consideration. Current and pending plans for new developments on the corner of Newmarket Road and East Road are in danger of turning the eastern part of the City into a canyon surrounded by high rise buildings which is out of keeping with its proximity to the Historic Core.

3. Maids Causeway, Willow Walk, New Square and Newmarket Road (west of East Road) should be included in the Historic Core Appraisal when it is updated – and BruNK should be consulted.

4. Finally, we were astonished that planning permission was granted for the 6 storey Varsity Hotel overlooking Jesus Green, which sits among mostly two and three storey residential dwellings and is very visible from Jesus Green. We hope that this new Skyline Guidance will prevent any such developments being approved for anywhere near Midsummer Common or any of the other green spaces that contribute so much to the unique character of the City.

on behalf of BruNK Committee
09.12.11